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Webster tells senator he will review Gates testimony

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI Director William H. Webster, on his way to virtually certain Senate confirmation as head of the CIA, reluctantly agreed yesterday to review the Senate testimony of Deputy CIA Director ~~Robert M. Gates~~ to determine whether he deceived Congress about the Iran-contra affair and whether he should remain at the agency.

The request came from Senate intelligence committee member Arlen Specter, R-Pa., during the second day of Mr. Webster's confirmation hearings.

Senator Specter asked Mr. Webster whether he feels Mr. Gates should step down in light of the fact that he helped then-CIA Director William J. Casey prepare what many in Congress say was Mr. Casey's misleading testimony to the committee last November.

The senator told Mr. Webster that his confirmation hearings likely would be held over until after Congress returns from Easter recess the week of April 19. In the meantime, Senator Specter said, he wants Mr. Webster to review Mr. Gates' testimony, which brought out the deputy CIA director's participation in preparing Mr. Casey's congressional appearance.

"Senator, I don't want to, but if you insist, I'll review the testimony,"

Mr. Webster replied. The FBI director said he did not know if Mr. Gates' testimony to the committee was sufficient to determine whether Mr. Gates should remain at the CIA.

"I can't guarantee that I would want to express an opinion on that narrow a record," Mr. Webster added.

"I would appreciate if you would because . . . I think it is . . . really the crux of the matter as to appropriate disclosure by the CIA," Senator Specter replied.

"I am very interested in your response to that question because I think it's very important as to the continued service of Deputy Director Gates," Senator Specter told Mr. Webster at one point.

The senator said that Mr. Gates helped Mr. Casey prepare testimony that omitted a number of important facts about the Iran-contra affair.

Mr. Casey testified four days before Attorney General Edwin W. Meese's disclosure Nov. 25 that money from U.S. arms sales to Iran had been diverted to Nicaraguan rebels.

Mr. Casey had been told in Octo-

ber that money from Iranian arms sales might have been diverted to the rebels, but he did not mention this to the committee. Senator Specter pointed to three other omissions from Mr. Casey's testimony, including the fact that a key arms dealer in the weapons sales to Iran, Manucher Ghorbanifar, had flunked two polygraph examinations.

Committee chairman David L. Boren, D-Okla., disagreed with Senator Specter's suggestions that Mr. Gates perhaps should not remain at the agency, saying that Mr. Gates "has performed in an outstanding fashion and is continuing to render outstanding and very candid service."

Mr. Gates has denied that either he or the agency tried to cover up CIA participation in the Iran arms deal when the agency prepared Mr. Casey's congressional testimony.

"I did not know" during the period leading up to the Nov. 21 appearance by Mr. Casey "many of the facts of CIA's role, and while coordinating the effort, did not participate in drafting the testimony," Mr. Gates wrote to Senator Boren.